

## **Inquiry into Adoption of Children from Overseas**

As adoptive parents of a beautiful nine-month-old baby boy from Korea, we are delighted that there is an enquiry into intercountry adoption in Australia and thank you for the opportunity to contribute a submission.

### **1.) Any inconsistencies between state and territory approval process**

We applied to adopt a baby in March 2001 and then had to wait almost 2 years before we were invited to Education sessions run by the department for prospective adoptive parents. It took another year for our assessment to be completed and then another 9 months before we received the clearance to travel to Korea to bring home our baby boy. While in Korea, we met couples from other states in Australia who were also there to bring home their precious babies. We had waited by far the longest of anyone that we spoke to and were very surprised when one couple from NSW informed us that they had applied to adopt less than a year ago. We now know of other couples who have moved interstate and have completed their families in less than a year.

If a couple in Queensland decided today that they would like to adopt a child from overseas, they would have to wait until the intercountry adoption unit calls for expressions of interest. This could be another 3-4 years before this happens. They would then have to wait for their turn to be assessed, which could be another 2-3 years. Therefore, in our estimates it could be 5-7 years before they could even be considered for assessment. This demonstrates that the system for processing adoptive applicants in Queensland is deeply flawed and does not operate in the best interest of anyone, neither the prospective adoptive parents nor the homeless children in the world that are waiting for families to care for them.

We know of no other agency or department that can handle their waiting lists by simply shutting the books and not allowing anyone else to apply. This does not help satisfy the demand, but compounds it and makes longer waiting times for everyone.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1.) Australia needs to enter into agreements with more countries that have signed the Hague convention on intercountry adoption and increase the number of children that are available for adoption into Australia.
- 2.) There should be standard criteria and expected waiting times across Australia.

2.) Any inconsistencies between the benefits and entitlements provided to families with their own birth children and those provided to families who have adopted children from overseas.

We arrived home with our son when he was 28 weeks of age to discover that we were not eligible for the Maternity payment as he was above 26 weeks of age. This is clearly inequitable and is discriminatory against adoptive parents as most children that are adopted are above 26 weeks of age.

The costs involved in intercountry adoption are very high and we spent about \$25 000 in the adoption of our son. These costs do not change with the age of the child and therefore to have an age limit on the maternity payment for adoptees is not helpful. In fact, we believe that there should be some kind of financial relief for adoptive parents as forming a family through adoption is extremely difficult for low or medium income families. This amount could be equal to the amount that birth families already receive from the government. (Eg, calculate the Medicare rebates for IVF treatment, prenatal care, hospital costs and postnatal care.) This could be available as a lump sum for adoptive families.

**Recommendations:**

- 1.) The maternity payment should be available for every adoption regardless of the age of the child at placement. This should be backdated to the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 to reverse the discrimination that has already occurred.
- 2.) There should be additional financial relief available to adoptive families to assist with the huge costs associated with intercountry adoption.

Thankyou again for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Please contact me if you have any further queries.

Lyndell McKinley  
Queensland